RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Role of 'Sishu-Aloy' on school readiness among the pre-school children: A study in Birbhum district.

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Acronyms Used:

- AWC: Anganwadi Centre.
- AWW: Anganwadi worker.
- ASER: Annual Status of Education Report.
- ECC: Early Childhood Care.
- ECCE: Early Childhood Care and Education.
- ICDS: Integrated Child Development Services Scheme.
- UP: Uttar Pradesh.
- MP: Madhya Pradesh.
- S.C: Schedule Caste.
- SES: Socio Economic Scale.
- S.T: Schedule Tribe.
- WCD & SW: Department of Women and Child Development & Social Welfare.

1. Introduction:-

Shishu Aloy : Early Childhood Care and Education Centres for children.

Integrated Child development Services (ICDS) Scheme is a central sector scheme which has been implementing by the state governments since 1975, In West Bengal it was started on 2nd October 1975 with only two projects. This scheme aims at all round development of children belongs to 0- 6 years of age. Apart from nutrition, health & growth monitoring, immunisation; Pre-school education for 3 to 6 years of children is an important component of ICDS. Yet several studies indicated that the Pre-School Education of ICDS could not make the children ready for school at the age of 6 years. (ASER, 2017) This has forced a majority of population to take shelter in private nursery /Kindergarten for their kids' school readiness.

In view of the above in the year 2012 Government of West Bengal in the Department of WCD & SW undertook an initiative to revamp the Pre-school education component of ICDS, so that it prepares children better ready for the school at the age of 6 from the Anganwadi Centres itself. Shaping this vision into reality, the WCD&SW department through the Directorate of ICDS conceptualised & developed the ECCE curriculum with the technical support of UNICEF. To provide the excellent quality early childhood care & education the infrastructure of the ICDS centre also upgraded to make it child friendly. Such upgraded AWCs has named as Shishu Aloy by the honourable chief minister of West Bengal, which means an abode of children. The initiative was officially inaugurated on 25th November 2015 by the WCD&SW minister of state .The programme was started in twenty districts of West Bengal including two projects in Correctional Home for the children of correctional inmates i.e. Alipore Central Correctional Home & Dumdum Correctional Home. (Today, 2015)

Government of West Bengal targeted to upgrade each and every AWC to that of 'Shishu Aloy', so that whole population can avail Early Childhood Care and Education at their door step without any further financial investment**.** This step is aimed at creating a society with very little school dropout which will increase literacy rate with standard education and make society with better societal values and health.

There are 10,581,466 children in West Bengal between the age of 0-6 years or 11.07% of the state population, of which 51% are male and 49% are female (ICDS Annual Action Plan,2012-13).There are 1,19,418 operational Anganwadis under the ICDS Scheme which act as the only avenue for nutrition, health services and pre-school education for a vast majority of disadvantaged children; but to maintain the quality of service and to make it attractive for the child was always a challenge. That's why the new ECCE curriculum has been rolled out in 23 districts in West Bengal.

13000 Anganwadi centres are currently functioning as 'Sishu Aloy' implementing the ECCE practices as per the ECCE curriculum. More than one lakh children are currently benefitting from the program. The uniqueness of the programme in West Bengal is defined by the creation of Master Trainers within the multi-layered training strategy. 2300 Supervisory staff have been trained as Master Trainer & 13000 Angawadi workers have been trained on ECCE new curriculum till now.(UNICEF INDIA).

Essential components of ECCE Centre (Shishu Aloy): A model ECCE Centre should exhibit certain physical and qualitative features for it to be called a Model Centre.

- Good infrastructure
- Provision of adequate natural light and ventilation
- Separate space allocated for cooking nutritionally balanced food.
- Adequate and safe drinking water,
- Child-friendly toilet
- Developmentally appropriate, tested, curriculum and Handbook with routine
- Developmentally appropriate ECE kit containing adequate appropriate TLM and Toys
- AWW are trained to transact 4 hours routine of ECE curriculum
- Effective developmentally appropriate classroom processes including theme based decoration)
- Participation of Parents & community & they should aware about the importance of the program.

Early childhood care and education:-

The tradition of Early childhood education or popularly known as pre-school education is deep rooted in our Indian history; though it shapes formal structure at the latter half of the nineteenth century when Gijubhai Badheka and Tarabai Modak, among others, became the pioneers of this movement in the country. Influenced by Madame Montessori's visit to India, they established preschool education centres in Gujarat. In 1946 Madame Montessori met Mahatma Gandhi, who asked her to 'indianize' her method to make preschool education available to a large majority of children. That was the beginning of 'pre basic education' in the rural parts of the country, largely through voluntary effort. Till India's independence in 1947, voluntary agencies and private institutions primarily fulfilled the need for ECCE, particularly in the form of preschool education. The first government initiative in this area was the setting up of a Central Social Welfare Board in 1953, which started a grant–in–aid scheme for voluntary agencies. Over this half century, however, the concept of early childhood care and education (integrating health, nutrition and education aspects) has been widely accepted.

India has in this context, been able to put together a fairly supportive policy framework and has launched some major initiatives for children for this stage of development, among which ICDS is the major flagship program to ensure the early childhood education to the children. It was started in 1975 on the auspicus occasion of Gandhi Jayanti i.e 2nd October with only 33 projects and now it is upgraded to centre for the early childhood care and the education to provide an excellent quality head start for the pre-school children (Sankar, 2015, p. 3).

National ECCE Policy: The historic Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE) enacted by the Government of India guaranteed the right to education to every Indian child till 14 years of age. Section 11 of the RTE directs the appropriate Governments to make necessary arrangement for providing free pre-school education for children. According to 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002, a state govt must endeavour to provide ECCE for all children until they complete the age of six. Subsequently, the area received a major thrust in the National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy, 2013 which stipulates Government of India to implement multi – pronged approach to ensure developmentally appropriate practices of ECCE. The aim of the Policy is to strengthen the Anganwadis as "vibrant ECCE centres" through revised package of services with early childhood learning as one of its focus. The National ECCE curriculum framework and guiding principles have been laid down for the State Governments to develop their own curriculum and implement the instruments of ECCE policy in the AWCs and ECCE Centres.

National ECCE Curriculum:

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The National ECCE Curriculum framework states that the curriculum must address the following interrelated domains of holistic development through an integrated approach which focuses on development of life skills such as Physical and Motor Development; Language Development; Cognitive Development; Socio-Personal and Emotional Development; Sensorial Development; Development of Creative and Aesthetic Appreciation. (ECCE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK, 2015)

Objectives of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE):

The aim of Early Childhood Care and Education is to facilitate optimum development of the child's full potential and lay the foundation for all round development and lifelong learning. While parents and home have the main responsibility of the welfare of the child, a strong partnership between the community and the ECCE centres is important for the well being of the child and in achieving the following objectives.

Broad objectives of the Early Childhood Care and Education programme are to:

• Ensure each child is valued, respected, feels safe and secure and develops a positive self concept

• Enable a sound foundation for physical and motor development of each child- as per each child's potential

• Imbibe good nutrition routines, health habits, hygiene practices and self help skills

• Enable children for effective communication and foster both receptive and expressive language

• Promote development and integration of the senses

• Stimulate intellectual curiosity and develop conceptual understanding of the world around by providing opportunities to explore, investigate and experiment

• Enhance development of pro-social skills, social competence and emotional well being

• Develop sense of aesthetic appreciation and stimulate creative learning processes.

• Imbibe culturally and developmentally appropriate behaviour and core human values of respect and love for fellow human beings.

• Enable a smooth transition from home to ECCE centre to formal schooling

• Enhance scope for overall personality development (ECCE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK, 2015, p. 10)

School Readiness:

School readiness can be defined by two characteristic features on three dimensions. The characteristic features are 'transition' and 'gaining competencies', and the dimensions are children's readiness for school, schools' readiness for children, and families' and communities' readiness for school.

The three dimensions of school readiness are:

(1) Ready children, focusing on children's learning and development.

(2) Ready schools, focusing on the school environment along with practices that foster and support a smooth transition for children into primary school and advance and promote the learning of all children.

(3) Ready families, focusing on parental and caregiver attitudes and involvement in their children's early learning and development and transition to school.

All three dimensions are important and must work in tandem, because school readiness is a time of transition that requires the interface between individuals, families and systems. The term 'transition' has several meanings, depending on the setting, the nature of the cultural and psychosocial adjustments involved, and the role of the actors in shaping their transition. (Fabian and Dunlop 2006; Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead 2008).

Children's readiness for school refers to all children, especially the vulnerable and disadvantaged, including girls, ethnic minorities and those living in rural areas. In addition, readiness for school is different from readiness to learn. While readiness for school implies being prepared to succeed in a structured learning setting, readiness to learn is a characteristic from birth. All children are born ready to learn (Kagan 1999). This learning occurs prior to entering school and extends beyond the walls of a classroom to daily life.

Children, schools and families are considered ready when they have gained the competencies and skills required to interface with the other dimensions and support smooth transitions of children from home to ECCE centre and subsequently to primary school. Typically school readiness is understood or rather has been based on the assumption that there is a predetermined set of skills and abilities that all children need before entering primary school. Most specifically in India it is assumed that children entering primary schools would have achieved the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic (commonly known as 3Rs) ((UNICEF, 2012). School readiness program is an integral part of ECCE which specially designed for the children belongs to age group of 4-6 years.

2. Operational definition of various key terms used:

'**Sishu Aloy':** Sishu Aloy is the upgraded version of ICDS centre which is considered as the model ICDS centre. 'Sishu Aloy' is the centre through which the early childhood education and care program is being implemented. The name literally means the abode of children, where they can get security and a stimulating environment for their growth and development.

Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE): The widely used term 'early childhood care and education' (ECCE) refers to a range of processes and mechanisms that sustain and support development during the early years of life: it encompasses education, physical, social and emotional care, intellectual stimulation, health care and nutrition. It also includes the support a family and community need to promote children's healthy development.

Early Child Hood: Early childhood, defined as the period from birth to eight years old, is time of remarkable growth with brain development as its peak. During this stage, children are highly influenced by the environment and the people that surround them.

School Readiness: School readiness can be defined by two characteristic features on three dimensions. The characteristic features are 'transition' and 'gaining competencies', and the dimensions are children's readiness for school, schools' readiness for children, and families' and communities' readiness for school

Language barrier: A language barrier is a term primarily refers to linguistic barriers between the mother language and the medium of expression, i.e the difficulties in communication experienced by people or groups speaking different languages, or even dialects in some cases.

3. Review of Literature based on thematic areas: A literature review can be defined as survey of books, scholarly articles, and any other sources relevant to a particular issue, area of research, or theory, and by so doing, provides a description, summary, and critical evaluation of these works in relation to the research problem proposed to investigate. Literature reviews are designed to provide an overview and to demonstrate how the proposed research fits within a larger field of study. The researcher has organised his review of literature based on the conceptual categories which can be termed as thematic review of literature.

IMPORTANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION:

Kaul,V & Ramachandran (1994): Carried out a study with an attempt to assess the impact of early childhood care and education on the retention of children in primary grades. The sample was drawn from the primary preschools located near the early childhood education centre in eight states in India. The total sample consisted of 31,483 children, out of which 10,636 children had early childhood education experience whereas 20,847 children were admitted indirectly from home. Each cohort of children was identified state-wise and year-wise, and followed up from 1983-84 to 1986-87. The tools used in the study were information blanks and master sheets. The major findings of the study are that children with ECE experience were found to have a better retention as compared to children who had direct entry in the preschools. The difference in percentage of the two groups was higher in favor of ECE children by 16.4, 20.5, 13.33 and 8.04 respectively for cohorts. The dropout rate for ECE group was less (31.8%) than that for the direct entry children (48.2%).The maximum dropout rate was when children moved from grade 1st to 2nd. The impact of ECE experienced on retention in primary grades was greater for girls as compared to boys.

NIPCCD (1994): Sponsored a study to assess the impact of ECCE on primary school enrolment, school adjustment and readiness of children. The findings of the study revealed that 86% of children from ECE stream join primary school and interestingly girls' enrolment were found to be marginally higher than boys' enrolment. The high enrolment rate clearly indicated that the parents sent their children to ECE centers with a view to give them good head start in educational pursuit. Further school adjustment and readiness scale was also administered on 304 children; 152 children in each group consisting of those who has attended ECE centers and those who did not attend. It was found that children with ECE exposure scored better with respect of various school readiness parameters- writing readiness (91%), sound discrimination (70%), pairing of objects (80%) and classification of objects (80%).

Upadhay (1997): A study was conducted by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in four regions of the country on a sample of 1495 children admitted in grade 1, found the average reading readiness score to be 47% with marked deficiency in sound discrimination and audio-visual matching task. It was found that children who directly go to primary schools from their homes do not exhibit the desired levels of readiness. The results recommend the provision of good early childhood education (PSE) programme while ensuring that children who directly enter primary school benefit from school readiness programme.

ROLE OF ICDS IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

Sharma (1992): National evaluation of ICDS indicated the positive role played by ICDS (as compared to non-ICDS areas) in promoting enrolment in elementary preschools. However, the report also stated that there was tremendous scope for improving the implementation of the pre-school education component (PSE) of the ICDS. Non availability of play and learning material was a major constraint. Children in the national study did not perform well on identification of colors and other cognitive task, emphasizing the need for conducting creative and cognitive activities as an integral part of the preschool education component. Community participation was also weak link in the ICDS program.

(Manhas, 2017): In a study on Parental Perception towards pre-school education reveals that majority of the parents (50%) were aware about all the services of ICDS Scheme which have a beneficial impact on the children's overall development (Table 5). Significant differences were found among the two groups of parents about their awareness regarding ICDS Services.77% of the preschool parents were not aware of any of the services being imparted under ICDS Scheme. In both the categories there was however more knowledge about the nutrition scheme only. Same findings are held in a study that parents usually consider anganwadi centre as a bread centre", where only nutrition is given. They felt that quality of services is poor and children do not learn much.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

(D.Pellergini, 1995) It is found in the study that early reading experiences of children with parents prepare them for the benefits of formal literacy instruction. Parental involvement in their child's reading has been found to be most important determinant of language and emergent literacy. Furthermore, parents who introduce their children to books in early age give them a head start in school and an advantage over their peers throughout primary school. Involvement with reading activities at home has significant positive influences not only on reading achievement, language comprehension and

expressive language skills, but also on pupil's interest in reading, attitude towards reading and attentiveness in the classroom. It's therefore important that parents and care takers must be aware of the significant contribution they can make to their children's learning by providing a stimulating environment around language, reading and writing as well as supporting at home the school's literacy both in early and primary years.

Nair (1997) reported that parents must have information about the care that is to be given to children in early years and also be made aware of support services such as ECCE and similar services such as anganwadi, this awareness may help parents to provide favourable environment for the child's development with respect to health, hygiene and nutrition. Parents can also be made aware of play-way activity, child centred method of learning at the preschool level to bring about necessary school readiness as an initial step to further schooling. Such awareness creation would go a long way in bringing about 40 quantitative and qualitative improvements in primary education because a physically and mentally healthy child with necessary school readiness will rarely dropout from school.

SCHOOL READINESS AND ETHNIC GAP:

(Samanta S, 2017), did a study, on the status of school readiness. The overall average school readiness score of 210 children was 14.03 ± 3.71 (mean ± SD) with range of 5–24 (full marks was 40). One-fourth (25%) of the students got score below 12, 50% students got score between 12 and 17 and 25% students got score above 17. It was found that mother's education, other help in studies and SES had significant effects on school readiness. After the post hoc test for SES, it revealed that there was significant difference between various categories of socio-economic status. Gender and castes of AW children were found to have no significant association with school readiness. Age, education, and marital status of AWWs also had no effect on school readiness of the target children. Training status in the form of the time interval since last training (whether training was done >5 years ago or ≤5 years ago) was found to have effect on school readiness. Mean school readiness score of the centers in which AWWs got training ≤5 years ago was higher than the centers where AWWs received the same >5 years ago, and the difference was found to be statistically significant. It was also found that timing of other works done by the AWWs affected school readiness of the children. The centers in which AWWs went out for other works during the operation of ECE had lower mean value of school readiness than the centers whose AWWs did other works before/after the operation of ECE; however, the difference was not statistically significant.

Katherine & Jane (2005): did a study on the children of various racial and ethnic group of USA on the differing experience in early childhood care and education and to explore the links between these experience and racial and ethnic gaps in school readiness. Children who attend center care or preschool programs enter school more ready to learn, but both the share of children enrolled in these programs and the quality of care they receive differ by race and ethnicity. Black children are more likely to attend preschool than white children, but may experience lower-quality care. Hispanic children are much less likely than white children to attend preschool. The types of preschool that children attend also differ, both black and Hispanic children are more likely than white children to attend Head Start. (Waldfogel, 2005)

(MOET, Viet Nam and UNICEF Viet Nam, 2011): In a Pre-school assessment: to compare between mother tongue-based education and non-mother tongue-based education students in Viet Nam, 2010 two cohorts were selected who had completed their schooling in 2009 and 2010. The first cohort of students entered grade 1 of primary school in September 2009 and completed grade 1 in May 2010. Language assessments for pre-school students were carried out in three provinces at the beginning and end of each school year. A comprehensive assessment of grade 1 students was undertaken in May 2010 to measure the learning outcomes in the mother tongue, Vietnamese and mathematics as well as non-academic outcomes (life skills and learning attitudes). The results indicated superior performance by the cohort of students who had received mother-tongue based ECCE in key areas of cognitive development.

4. Gaps in the existing Knowledge:

The Integrated Child Development Sevices (ICDS) programme was started on 2nd Octerber, 1975, with only 33 projects all over the india, to provide services through its network of Anganwadi Centres (AWC), after that it has expanded considerably in subsequent years. From its inception to present time several studies are being conducted on the various dimensions of ICDS but the pre-school education component of the ICDS was always being neglected in comparison to the other component. It is always viewed as the centre for the mother & Child's nutrition. So very little empirical data is available in this field. There are very few studies have been carried out in Birbhum district, The Human Dvelopment Report of Birbhum District is the only study available which represents the picture of ICDS in Bitbhum District. The researcher can also figure out some thematic area where the gaps exist in the available knowledge base.

Quality education for all: The pre-school education is an age old concept in the Indian Society. Govt. Of India is providing the pre-school education through ICDS centre since long back, but there was no specific curriculum framework, so there was no scope to check the quality of the pre-school education but presently in ECCE program a curriculum framework has been introduced, A in depth study of the curriculum framework and its objective can fill this gap

Community perception and ownership: Community participation is an important part of any community based program and in ICDS program it is always a challenge. It has become an established concept to the parent that ICDS is the centre mainly to look after the mother and child's nutrition who are being starved or facing malnutrition, So the parent don't fill encouraged to send their children to ICDS for the purpose of the study. ECCE program has been designed to change this perception and to create community ownership, but unfortunately very few studies have been carried out in this filed which poses a large gap in the existing knowledge.

Multilingualism: Language is the foremost instrument of our communication process; it is also an important media of our learning. The mode of communication is the important factor for children's learning. The medium of interaction in the ECCE centre should be home language or mother tongue. However, there may be more than one language as mother tongue, It is therefore important to allow as many languages as are in the classroom to be used for expression. We know that language is closely linked to child's identity and emotional security. Therefore, it is important to encourage different languages for expression by children in the ECCE centres. The Anganwadi workers ought to learn different language so that they can apply it in the learning process, but how far they are successful to bridge the gap must be explored through extensive research study.

School Readiness: School readiness is relatively new concept in the Indian context. School readiness is a composite concept which also encompasses the readiness of the parent and the readiness of the school to children. We can find many researches on the effect of pre-school education in the cognitive development of children but very few studies available on School readiness. In West Bengal the school readiness programme has been initiated with the inauguration of model ICDS programme. A specific learning material also designed to make children ready for the school, but very little empirical data is available about its effectiveness. Moreover the longitudinal study on the lasting impact of early childhood education on retention and performance of the children in primary grades is also a big lacuna in the existing knowledge.

5. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY:

The Integrated Child Development Services Scheme (ICDS) is one of the flagship program by Govt. of India with special reference to children and women. Preschool education to the children of 0-6 years is an important and crucial component of the scheme. But unfortunately it has become an established concept that Anganwadi centre is a centre for taking care of child and mothers' nutrition. It was a challenge to govt to shift the idea from 'Khichdi' centre to a centre of excellence where all developmental issues of a child upto six years of age is taken care of including pre-school education. In view of above in the year 2012 Government of West Bengal with the Department of WCD & SW undertook an initiative to revamp the PSE component of ICDS so that it prepares children better ready at the age of 6 from the Anganwadi Centres itself. Thus the Early Childhood care and education program(Sishu Aloy) started in West Bengal on 25th November 2015. So, it's a paradigm shift for the ICDS program. The present study has been broadly designed to study this program and to evaluate its importance and implication on child development from the community's perception. As it is envisaged that once a model centre is operating, it is no longer a policy deal- it becomes a community ownership.

In India a large number of children are first generation learners and come to school without social, academic or language readiness. Across the country learning levels in first few grades are low which may be symptomatic of this issue. It is well known that as more and more children enter school, there are high incidences of drop outs, repeating grades, enrolling too late or too early, and thus failing to learn. As a result educational disparities are ever increasing. In the latest ASER report(2017) conducted by PRATHAM it has revealed that although all most all children are enrolled in school, many are not acquiring foundational skills like reading and basic arithmetic that can help them to progress in school and life. It is challenging the fact that the pre-school education is being provided through the wide range of ICDS centre since more than forty years in our country. To fill this gap and to provide proper input on Reading, Writing, Numeracy and Science readiness Directorate of ICDS has developed an ECCE curriculum framework with the technical support of UNICEF. As this curriculum has been started just few years ago, so there almost no empirical data is available on the nature and content of this early child hood education. The main dimensions of early childhood education covered through the physical setup of centre, developmental activities, teaching methodology, preschool teacher related aspects,

syllabus and program plan and parental interaction. The present study had been designed to fill the lacunae by collecting in-depth and holistic data on early childhood education imparted as part of the model ICDS Scheme (Sishu Aloy).

Language and the provision of mother tongue-based ECCE programmes are important issues in India. Language of choice in programmes and services has a significant impact on early learning. Research has also highlighted the value of ECCE as a crucial pathway in addressing children in disadvantaged circumstances, including in lower caste groups, such as the Dalits in Nepal (Bartlett et al., 2003), Any single state language used as a medium of interaction in preschools/ ECCE centres poses problems for children coming from different language backgrounds and dialects, especially in the tribal belt of the state. It is a challenge for the ECCE teacher/ caregiver to cope with different languages at the same time in an early childhood setting. Teachers also attempt to learn a few words and phrases of the child's home language. In a multilingual classroom, children are ought to be encouraged to express themselves in their own language and to pay attention to and learn from each other. This is a natural and easy process in play situations. The home environment is also very important factor of Child's learning ability.The learning at the school environment must be nurtured at the family environment for its future persistence. The correlation between the language barrier and children's learning abilities is the scope of my study. The family background of the child also would be taken into account at the time of analysis.

School readiness is relatively new concept in the Indian context. School readiness can be defined by two characteristic features on three dimensions. The characteristic features are 'transition' and 'gaining competencies', and the dimensions are children's readiness for school, schools' readiness for children, and families' and communities' readiness for school. So merely children's readiness to primary education in terms of reading, writing and numerical ability is not important, the parent's readiness and the school readiness is also crucial to make the program successful. School readiness is not only the cognitive development of the children; it encompasses all other related concept. Moreover we can say that it is more a social phenomena than psychological one. The school readiness is the integral part of the ECCE program. This program mainly targets the children under the age group of 4-6 years. As this was started only few years ago in West Bengal the effectiveness of ECCE curriculum has never been tested. My present study would try to explore that area.

6. Locale of the study:

Birbhum is one of the 23 districts of West Bengal sharing 5.12 per cent of the land area of the state but 3.76 per cent of its total population, indicating a relatively lower density of population per square kilometre in the district (771) vis-a vis the state (903). According to 2011 census Birbhum district has a population of 3'502'387. Its population growth rate over the decade 2001-2011 was 16.15% and Birbhum has a sex ratio of 956 female for every 1000 males.

The land of Birbhum is occupied by diversified groups of people among them a large number of people belong to backward class i.e. the S.C, S.T & Muslims. According to 2011 census Muslims are about 33% of total population and 29.5% of the population belong to Scheduled Caste, where as Scheduled Tribe represents the 6.7% of the total population.

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) in Birbhum:

In the district Birbhum, ICDS was launched with three projects i.e Mayureswar-1, Md.Bazar & Sainthia in the year 1982. Amongst those three projects, Md.Bazar & Sainthia projects are Tribal Projects and the Mayureswar-1 ICDS project is rural project.

There are 4796 AWCs operational across 19 blocks of Birbhum. Except in one block (Nalhati-I) , all AWCs are run by the government. ICDS project in NALHATI- 1 is run by a NGO.

The 'Sishu Aloy' program was started in Birbhum on15th November 2015 along with the other 20 districts. In first phase 145 AWCs were converted to Sishu Aloy, distributed to the 19 blocks of the district; in Bolpur 55 and others block 90(18x5) and presently 550 'Sishu Aloy' functioning in the district.The average population of children of age group 0-6 years covered per AWC is about 120 in Birbhum district as a whole but it is optimized that there at least one Sishu Aloy for every 30 children.

7. Research Question:

- What are the challenges that are facing to implement the 'Early childhood care & education program' in Birbhum district?

- Is there any significant difference in school readiness among the pre-school children belongs to tribal and non-tribal group?

8. Objectives:

To incorporate proper directions and effectiveness of the present study, rational objectives are being framed in two categories, which are mentioned below:

Broad objectives:

- To evaluate the status of model ICDS centre and its effect on school readiness among the pre-school children.

Specific Objectives:

- To study the nature of Early Childhood education imparted at 'Sishu Aloy'.

- To study the gaps and challenges facing by the 'Sishu Aloy' in its implementation.

- To assess the relation between the early childhood education and the school readiness among the pre- school children catered by the 'Sishu Aloy'.

- To explore the differences in school readiness among the children belonging to Tribal and Non-Tribal Group.

- To study the perception of parents about the importance of early childhood education and the role of 'Sishu Aloy' to make the children ready for the school.

- To assess the role of 'Sishu Aloy' in ensuring enrolment of the pre-school children in primary school.

9. Methodology:

The present study is based on exploratory research design. However the study would use mixed method- both quantitative and qualitative in nature.

9.1. Universe of the study:

The universe of the study is 550numbers. of 'Sishu Aloy' operational in 19 blocks of Birbhum District.

9.2. Sampling:

To determine the required sample size among this large no. of sample, the researcher would apply a multi-layer stratified sampling. There are three sub-division in Birbhum district, these are, i) Bolpur Sub-Division, ii) Rampurhat Sub-division and iii) Suri Sadar Subdivision. The researcher would select two blocks from each Sub-division representing the tribal infested and a non-tribal infested block. So, total six blocks would be selected among the 19 blocks of Birbhum district. These six blocks are 1) Nalhati-ii & 2) Rampurhat-i from Rampurhat Sub-Division; 3) Mohammad Bazar & 4) Suri-i from Suri Sadar Sub-division and 5) Bolpur-Sriniketan and 6)Nanoor from Bolpur Sub-division. These blocks are selected based on population in the age group of 0-6 years representing both from tribal and non-tribal group, distance from the resources and Economic prosperity.(Census Data-2011 and Birbhum Map attached)
In each block the researcher would select five model anganwadi center (Sishu Aloy) for its study from the total no. of anganwadi center. So total (5*6) =30 'Sishu Aloy' would be selected for the study.
A group of ten children from each 'Sishu Aloy' belongs 5-6 years would be selected for the study. It means total (30*10) =300 respondents would be selected for the present study.
Another group of respondents would be selected from the Parents, Anganwadi worker (AWW), Anganwadi Supervisor, Child Development Project Officer & the District Project Officer.

9.3 Types of data required: The present study would require both primary and secondary types of data

Primary data: Primary data would be retrieved from the test by utilizing the testing schedule designed by World Bank India, administered on the children belongs to 5-6 years. The testing schedule would be administered after the due validation from the select expert & pre-testing.

Secondary data:

The secondary data would be obtained from various govt. policies and programs, government statistical reports and records. More over a wide range of review of literature would enrich the secondary data.

9.4. Tools description:

ECE Programme Evaluation Package developed by World Bank will be the main study tool. Among the different components of the package, observation checklist of physical facility and performance of children, interview schedule for AWWs, and school readiness instrument kit for completed 5-year-old children would be utilized in this study. The World Bank toolkit was validated by administering on 426 children in the 5–6 years age group randomly selected at household level in three provinces of India, i.e., Bihar, UP and MP in 2007. This is standardized by Australian Council for Educational Research.

9.5. Administration:

The test will be administered separately for each child belongs to age group of 4-6 years,for each 'Sishu Aloy' ten students would be selected randomly.The test would be administered individually and orally, average span of administration would be 30-40 minitues.

9.6. Analysis & Interpretation:

The mix- methods i.e qualitative and quantitative both approaches will be instrumented to analyze and interpret the data collected from the respondents. It involves editing and evaluating of primary data. Collected data would be entered into Microsoft excel spreadsheet and Mean, standard deviation (SD), and proportion would be estimated as descriptive statistics. Tables would be used for displaying data. Pearson's correlation coefficient (r), unpaired 't'-test, would be applied to find out the relationship between school readiness and its correlates such as physical facility, classroom performance of children, language barrier, attributes of AWWs, and baseline characteristics of the children.

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